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ABSTRACT

This study explored the potent sources of stress for a sample of teachers, investigated the differences in stress predictors for men and women, and examined the consequences of stress for men and women. Twenty-five public school teachers participated; sixteen of these were women and nine were men. The study was conducted through interviews with the teachers. Stressors were categorized under three broad categories: job-related factors, interpersonal factors, and general organizational factors. The interviews sought to determine the perceived role demands that an irdividual is unable to satisfy and the extent of symptoms of strain. Results indicated that quantitative rcle overload was the stress most frequently experienced by the subjects, followed by role ambiguity and role conflict. Stressors generally tended to be more potent for women than for men. Job variety, job responsibility, and interpersonal characteristics were found to be salient stressors for women. No stressor appeared to be salient for men. Crganizational stressor's were minimally potent among both men and women. While women were more likely to report the experience of rola stress than vere. men, stress resulted in the experience of psychological strain for both men and women. Stress had predictable effect or mer. For women, however, role stress was inversely related to physiclegical and behavioral strain symptoms. (JD)

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Running Head: Role Stress

Paper presented at the 89th annual convention of the Americal Psychological Association, Los Angeles, August 27, 1981.

The positive and negative effects of organizational membership have been studied extensively in recent years. The research demonstrates that work-related stresses and strains are significant in the lives of employees. The research also indicates that many stress dynamics may be different for female and male employees. But this research has focused almost exclusively on industrial employees. Thus, the role of public school teachers as organizational employees who are subject to pressures and demands, and who handle these pressures and demands with varying degrees of success, has been given scant attention. Furthermore, little research has been devoted to discovering gender differences in the nature, antecedents, and consequences of work role stress among public school teachers. The present paper attempts to begin filling these gaps.

Following Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) and Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, and Pinneau (1975), role stress is defined as a function of both the individual and the organization (the school). Role stress is the presence of received role demands from the environment that an individual is unable to satisfy and which, therefore, pose a threat for him/her. The inability to satisfy these demands may stem from insufficiency of supplies to meet the demand (an environmental characteristic) or from a lack of relevant skills on the part of the individual (a personal characteristic). Role stress can be present in many forms, including role ambiguity (unclear role expectations), role conflict (incompatible role expectations), role overload (lack of time or ability to meet role expectations), role underload (inability to use relevant skills and abilities), and role insufficienty (inadequate resources to meet role expectations). Role strain, on the other hand, is an individual characteristic represented as a response

by the individual that deviates from the normal. Role strain can assume psychological (e.g., job dissatisfaction, depression, low self-esteem), physiological (e.g., peptic ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease), or behavioral (e.g., escapist drinking, drug use) forms (Caplan et al., 1975). Furthermore, several forms of role strain can be evident simultaneously.

Although systematic investigations of the precursors of role stress, labeled stressors, are rare, some evidence does exist to suggest the various work-related variables associated with work role stress. As mentioned earlier, most of this evidence is derived in inudstrial settings. Stressors can be classified under three broad categories: job-related factors, interpersonal factors, and general organizational factors.

Job-related stressors characterize the tasks that the employee performs to satisfy role demands. Several job-related stressors have been identified in previous research. For example, responsibility for people, as opposed to responsibility for things, is sometimes considered stressful (French & Caplan, 1970; Wardwell, Hyman, & Bahnson, 1964). Gavin and Axel-rod (1977) also discovered that responsibility for other people was related to many kinds of role stress, including role conflict, role ambiguity, quantitative work load, and job pressures. Other job-related factors to be investigated as potential precursors of stress include job variety and task completeness (Walsh, Taber, & Beehr, 1980) and feedback from the job (Teas, Wacker, & Hughes, 1979). Despite the sparse empirical research in the area, it seems reasonable for aspects of the job to affect the experience of role stress.

Interpersonal stressors characterize the "people" environment in which



an employee functions. Miles (1977) reported that the role set configuration was an important predictor of some types of role conflict and ambiguity. Three sets of interpersonal influence's are important for most employees -supervisors, peers, and subordinates. The importance of supervisors in defining the extent to which a job is stressful has often been emphasized (e.g., Schuler, 1980; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). In a similar vein, Bedeian, Armnekis, and Curran (1981) reported significant relationships between role conflict ard role ambiguity on the one hand and supervisory goal emphasis, supervisory support, supervisory work facilitation, and supervisory interaction facilitation on the other. Peers and colleagues are frequently significant sources of role definitions. Obviously, office politics and colleagues' rivalries can pose problems for an inividual. But another aspect of peer relationships is probably a more common stressor. Stress may result from inadequate peer support in difficult social situations (Lazarus, 1966). The centrality of peer relationships and social support has also been demonstrated in various empirical studies (e.g., Bede-, ian et al., 1981; LaRocco, House, & French, 1980). Characteristics of subordinates are also potential stressors. For example, Miles (1975) found personnel supervision to be a critical stressor among R&D professionals. But few empirical investigations have attempted a systematic examination of students as role senders and, therefore, potential sources of stress for teachers.

General organizational properties are also potential stressors. Various studies (e.g., Adams, Laker, & Hulin, 1977; Herman, Dunham, & Hulin, 1975; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1981) have demonstrated that organizational structure affects employee attitudes and perceptions. Schuler (1977) reported that

interactions among structure, technology, and task characteristics were related to role ambiguity and conflict. Moch, Bartunek, and Brass (1979) also found significant structure-stress relationships. Another organizational variable related to role stress is the extent of employee participation in decisions affecting their work lives. Buck (1972) and French and Caplan (1970), among others, indicated that lack of participation may height ten employee stress.

In short, job characteristics, interpersonal characteristics, and general organizational characteristics have been shown in previous investigations to affect role stress. Since most of this work was conducted in non-educational settings, however, the extent of generalizability of these findings to teachers is unclear. One purpose of the present study is to explore the applicability of previous findings to a sample of teachers.

A second objective of the study is to explore the relationships between role stress and role strain among the teachers in the sample. Many strain indicators have been related to the incidence of stress in the past. For example, role conflict has been related to irritation, somatic complaints, anxiety, and depression (Caplan et al., 1975), job dissatisfaction and job-related tension (Kahn et al., 1964), heart rate (French & Caplan, 1970), ulcers (Margolis & Kroes, 1964), etc. Likewise, role ambiguity has been linked to anxiety (Caplan et al., 1975), depression (Beehr, 1976; French & Caplan, 1973), blood pressure and pulse rate (French & Caplan, 1970), and other strain symptoms. The relationships between stresses and strains among the teachers in the sample were among the foci of the present linvestigation.

The work-related experiences of male and female employees are not always parallel and interchangeable (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). That gender



affects the prediction of stress has been demonstrated in studies by Paul (1975, 1976). Tung (1980) also reported that female school administrators experienced significantly lower degrees of self-perceived occupational stress than did their male counterparts. Thus, another objective of the present study is to determine the extent to which gender differences are influential in establishing the potency of various stressors, stresses, and strains.

In summary, the present study has three major objectives:

- (1) to identify the potent sources of stress for a sample of teachers;
- (2) to explore differences in the predictors of stress for men and women; and
- (3) to examine the consequences of stress for men and women.

Method

A sample of teachers from three schools in one school district located in the Southwest provided the data for the present study. Of the 37 teachers in the original sample, 68% agreed to participate, yielding an overall analysis sample of 25 teachers. Sixteen of these teachers were women, and 9 were men.

The primary data sources were semi-structured interviews conducted by trained interviewers, generally in the teachers' homes. The interviews took approximately one hour to complete. The content of the interviews addressed several topics, including (a) the presence of job-related, interpersonal, and organizational stressors in the respondents' work lives; (b) the extent to which respondents experienced stress (role conflict, role overload, role underload, role ambiguity, and role insufficiency); (c) the extent to which



respondents experienced physiological, psychological, and behavioral symptoms of strain; and (d) respondents' demographic and background characteristics. Stimulus questions and probes were used to elicit information on each concept of interest. The stimulus questions and coding options relevant to the present study are listed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The coding scheme was developed specifically for the present study by the research staff.

Analysis Strategy

Sophisticated multivariate analysis techniques were considered inappropriate. The relative levels of stress for men and women were compared using simple one-way analysis of variance. The correlations between stressors and stresses, and between stresses and strains, were also computed for women and men. Due to the small sample sizes, however, the significance of the difference in correlations between men and women was not computed. Finally, qualitative information from the interviews was used to illustrate and elaborate upon the findings as necessary.

Results

The frequencies and mean levels of role stress for the overall sample, and separately for women and men, are presented in Table 2. The table also shows the significance of the difference in stress levels between female and male teachers. The results indicate, first, that quantitative role overload is the stress most frequently experienced by the sample, followed by role ambiguity and role Conflict. Second, the table shows that the



women in the sample were much more likely to report experiencing role stress than were the men. Of the six stresses examined in the present study, women experienced higher levels on three, i.e., on role ambiguity, quantitative role everload, and role insufficiency. The strongest differences were observed with respect to the quantitative role overload index.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows the correlations beteen stressors and stresses for the men and women in the sample. Some interesting differences between the two groups emerge from this analysis. With respect to job-related stressors, for example, variety and responsibility both affect at least two stresses for the women: only role insufficiency and and feedback were significantly related to each other for the men, however.

Insert Table 3 about here

Each interpersonal stressor was related to one stress for the womenproblems with the principal ere positively related to role insufficiency;
problems with colleagues were negatively related to qualitative role overload; problems with students were positively related to role conflict; and
discipline problems were positively related to role ambiguity. The one
negative correlation-between qualitative role overload and problems with
colleagues-ais somewhat intriguing. Among men, however, only two significant correlations were observed--a negative one between problems with
tilden's and role underload, and a positive one between discipline problems and quantitative role overload.

Organizational stressors appeared to affect more than women. Only



one correlation--between quantitative role overload and formalization--was significant for women. Among men, however, two significant negative correlations were observed, i.e., those between size and role insufficiency and between formalization and role conflict.

potent for women than for men; that job variety, job responsibility, and interpersonal characteristics are salient stressors for women; that no stressor is outstanding for men; and that organizational stressors are minimally potent among both men and women.

Table 4 shows the relationships between role stress variables and the psychological, physiological, and behavioral symptoms of strain. The table shows that, for both men and women, the psychological strain indices are by far the most likely to be associated with the experience of stress. Physiological strain indices were related to only one role stress, viz., quantitative role overload, and only for the women in the sample. The pattern of relationships between role stress and physiological role strain symptoms was somewhat puzzling. Surprisingly, quantitative role overload was positively related to overall physical health and negatively to the number of somatic complaints experienced by the women. Finally, for both men and women, quantitative role overload was significantly related to drug use. While the association among men was positive as predicted, however, the correlation between quantitative role overload and drug use among women was negative. This finding is also somewhat mysterious.

Insert Table 4 about here

In short, the results of the study show that women are much more likely

to report the experience of role stress than are men, that the stressors tend to be more potent for women than for men, and that stress results in the experience of psychological strain for both women and men. Among the women, furthermore, role stress is inversely related to symptoms of physiological and behavioral strain.

Discussion

The results of the present study provide some interesting insights

about the experience of stress among public school teachers, and about

gender differences in role stress dynamics.

One purpose of this investigation was to establish the extent to which conceptual frameworks of role stress based on industrial employees were applicable to school teachers. The present study shows that some antecedents and consequences of role stress are generalizable across employee groups. For instance, interpersonal variables, found predictive of role stress in industrial settings (e.g., LaRocco et al., 1980) were also salient in the work lives of teachers. Likewise, role stress resulted in the expereince of psychological strain among the present sample, just as it did among other employee groups (Caplan et al., 1975). On the other hand, some differences also emerged in the predictive modél for school teachers as opposed to other employees. For instance, Walsh et al. (1980) found variety to be unrelated to stress in their study, even though this variable was a consistent predictor of stress with the present data. Furthermore, particularly among the women, the behavioral and physiological strain symptoms were inversely related to stress. This finding was not predictable from previous research, which has consistently established



a positive relationship between stress and strain (e.g., French & Caplan, 1970: Margolis & Kroes, 1964).

In short, there were some similarities and differences between teachers and other employees in the variables that cause, and in the consequences of, role stress. Job characteristics are more influential predictors of role stress among teachers, and non-psychological strain indices are likely to be associated negatively with role stress.

The second purpose of the present study was to explore gender differences in the levels, antecedents, and tonsequences of role stress: Many significant differences emerged from the data between male and female teachers. First, women were more likely to experience stress than were men. Women reported higher levels of role ambiguity, role insufficiency, and role overload. The last difference is hardly surprising. Most women in the sample were married and had children. Given traditional division of household labor, the women in the present sample probably had to cope with many non-work demands that their male counterparts did not. To the extent that women could not complete school work in the school, and had multiple work and non-work demands on their non-work hours, their higher levels of reported role overload are to be expected.

That women in the present sample would experience higher role ambiguity than men was predictable from previous research. Paul (1975, 1976) reported similar findings among a sample of 293 male and 287 female teachers. Although no intuitive reason for the higher levels of role insufficiency experienced by the women could be offered, an examination of the interview protocols was illuminating. Many female teachers were housed in undesirable classrooms, had problems in getting secretarial/clerical support, and were

penerally expected to 'fend' for themselves. Male teachers, on the other hand, had easier access to the resources they needed, either because they taught 'valued' classes (athletics, band, math), or because the administration' responded with greater acquiscence to the men.

The potent stressors were also somewhat different for women and men.

Both job-related and interpersonal stressors had more consistent relation—
ships with role stress among women than among men. The relationships bet—
ween interpersonal variables and role stress among women are consistent with
previous research showing the greater emphasis attached by women than men
to social needs (e.g., Quinn & Shepard, 1974). In this context, it is
interesting to note that women who had problems with their colleagues were
less likely to feel qualitative overload than those women who did not have
problems with their colleagues. Since dealing with others is a critical
skill for teachers, it is possible that those teachers having problems with
their colleagues also lacked other interpersonal skills—hence, the relation—
ship of problems with colleagues and qualitative role overload.

The consistent relationships beteen job characteristics and stress among women was, however, unexpected. It may be that women consider teaching to be more critical development of students, and that this variable, therefore, poses greater problems for them. It may also be that women value job variety more than men, that on-the-job variety counteracts their other work-related problems. Further research is needed before these explanations for the present findings can be accepted, and the precursors of stress for men and women completely understood.

Finally, stress had predictable effects on strain for men. Among women, however, stress was negatively related to physiological and behavioral strain symptoms. The reasons for the findings are not immediately



obvious, but the consistency of its occurrence indicates that it may be more than an artifactual or chance phenomenon. Women may be more used to experiencing stress; they may have more non-job-related ailments; they may be less likely to report drug use and/or health -related matters to others. In any case, larger studies, involving multiple measurements of the phenomena, and larger sample sizes, may be able to shed some light on this intriguing result.

In conclusion, the present study shows that there is some generealizability of conceptual frameworks of role stress across employee groups. The major differences focus on the importance of job-related stressors among teachers as opposed to other employees, and on the relationships of stress to physiological and behavioral strain symptoms. Before these differences are accepted at face value, however, they must be explored in greater detail among larger samples, with multiple measurement techniques, and using longitudinal research designs.

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Concept .	Stimulus Question and Codes
ROLE STRESS	•
Role Conflict	Do you feel that people at school make demands on you that conflict with each other? (coded for overall level of role conflict; range: 1-3)
Role Ambiguity	Is your job as a teacher clearly defined and predictable? (coded for overall level of role ambiguity; range: 1-3)
Quantitative Role Overload	Do you feel like you have too much work to do at school? (coded for overall level of quantitative role overload; range: 1-3)
Qualitative Role Overload	Do you think that you have the skills and training necessary for you to do your job well? (coded for overall l'evel of qualitative role overload; range: 1-3)
Role Ünderload	Do you think you have skills, knowledge, training, experience, etc., that you would like to be using in your job as a teacher but cannot? (coded for overall level of role underload; range: -1-3)
Role Insufficiency	Do you have things you need (materials, equipment, space, etc.) that you need to do your job properly? (coded for overall level of role insufficiency; range: 1-3)
STRESSORS	
Job-Related ,	How would you describe your teaching job itself? (coded for levels of variety, feedback, and responsibility)
Interpersonal	Do you like the administrators in this school, i.e., the principal and the other administrative staff? (coded for severity of problems with principal)
•	How would you describe the other teachers in this school? (coded for severity of problems with colleagues)
	How about the studentsany problems with them? (coded for severity of problems with students)



Table P (Cont'd)

Concept,

Stimulus Question and Codes

How do discipline problems get handled? (coded for severity of discipline problems)

Organizational '

How would you describe the school overall? (coded for levels of size, formalization, bureaucratization, and participation)

ROLE STRAIN

Psychological Symptoms In general, how do you feel about yourself these days? (coded for levels of nervousness, irritation, depression, boredom, and self-esteem)

How do you feel about life in general? Are you satisfied and happy? (coded for levels of life dissatisfaction)

Do you like working for (SCHOOL NAME)? (coded for levels of job dissatisfaction)

Physiological Symptoms

How do you rate your general physical health? (coded for number of somatic complaints and overall physical health)

Běhavioral Symptoms Do you drink a lot of tea, coffee, colas, etc.? (coded for total caffeine intake)

Do you use drugs or medication a lot? (coded for total drug use)

Do you drink alcohol? (coded for total alcohol intake)

. Table 2

Relative Levels of Role Stress

. ,	Role Conflict	Role Ambiguity	Quantitative Role Overload	Qualitative Role Overload	Role Underload	Role Insufficiency
,		Overall	Sample (N = 25)		
Low	32%	32%	24%	36%	. 40%	48%
Medium	48%	40% ^	24%	40%	48%	28%
High	20%	28%	52%	20%	1 2%	24%
Mean	1.88	1,96	2,28,	1,83	1.72	1.76
•		Wo	omen (N = 17)		. ,	•
Low	41%	18%	6%	31%	47%	35%
Medium	35%	41%	23%	38%	41%	3,0%
High.	24%	41%	714	31%	12%	35%
- Mean	1.82	2.24	2.65	2500	1,65	2.00
•	,		Men (N = 8)			•
Low	13%	63%	63%	50%	25%	75%
. Medium	75%	37%	25%	50%	65%	25%
High	12%	. 0%	. 12%	0%	12%	0%
Mean	2,00	1.38	1.50	1,50 ,	1.88	1,25
F of differenc	•	8,47**	16.67**	2,44	. 0,60	5.21*

< .01

Table 3
Relationships between Stressors and Stresses

•	~	,	Rol	e Stress		
		• .	tative	Qualita- tive		Role
Stressors	Role Conflict	Role Ambiguity	Role Overload	Role . Overload	Role <u>Underload</u>	Insuf- ficiency
Job-Related		-			•	
Variety	73** .35 ^a	15 .41	.33 38	38 . <i>54</i>	65** 41	17 10 -
Feedback	.05 29	.16 30	08 .41	29 .29	13 .24	.17 =.67** /
Responsibi- lity	.10	.74** 30	.55** . <i>06</i>	.14 09	03 . <i>35</i>	.10 <i>30</i>
Interpersonal		•				
Principal	06 41	.03 .53	.11	.00 56	22 .42	.64** . <i>58</i>
Colleagues	30 12	20 05	.34 .39	47* .31	.09 . <i>01</i>	.31 .11
Students	.52*	23 .15	35	.35 .58	25 <i>84**</i>	·06
Discipline	.07	.70** . <i>07</i>	.11	.26 .00	.38 16	.36 .15
Organizational	<u>l</u>		•		•	•
Size	.20	.06 49	.02 27	.40	.21 .55	.40 65
Formaliza- tion	.05 <i>63*</i>	.27	.49* .10	15 .04	15 .03	.17
Bureaucra- tization	.29 52	31 -:-02	19 21	.06 . <i>30</i>	.29	14 .13
Participa- tion	.28	01 .37	40	07 .40	.38	25 .50

^{*}p < .05; **p < .01

aRegular type indicates correlations for women; italicized type indicates correlations for men.

Table 4 Relationships between Stresses and Strains

•	Role Stress						
à		•		Qualita-			
Role Strain	•	•	tative "		•	Role	
	Role	Role	Role	Role .	Role.	Insuf-	
	Conflict Am	biguity	<u>Overload</u>	Overload	Underload	ficiency	
Psychological		•		,	,		
Life Disşat-	.19 ,	.55*	11 *	; 32	.26	.28	
isfaction	.76*a	.29	.27	. 38	71*	. 22	
Job Dissat-	.52*	.18	13	.61*	.21	. 45	
isfaction	.00	07	.91**	.26	27	. 15	
ISTACTION		07	.01	, 50		· ,	
Nervousness	.25.	.34	21	.74**	.28	.70**	
•	.20	63	.29	45	 20 .	~. 20	
·	70 .	.24		.21	.68*	.38	
Irritation .	.32 16		.93**	35	.16	18	
	10	63	. 30	00	. 1,0		
Depression	.17	. 33	.11	.27	.44	.46	
,	.20	63	.29	45	20	.20	
			••			20	
Boredom .	.47	~ 20	46	. 47	.74**	.28	
•	30	. 15-	19	61	.30	.79*	
4	= 2 +	0.4	25	E 7	. 36	.37	
Low Self-	.56*	.06	25	.53	. 30 .00	.25	
Esteem .	.00	. 25	32	50	3 00	. 20	
Physiological	•						
Somatic Com-	.49	13	` +.58* [']	36	28	.38	
plaints	.00	.49	.09	.63	34	.07	
plaines ;	. 00			, ,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,	•	,	
Overall Physi-	38	17	.58*	40	24	47	
cal Health		. 05	64	. 18	11	.31	
Behavioral		-		,			
		•	25	21	0.0	10	
Caffeine	.51*	.04	.25	.21	08	10 53	
•	.6 5	.57	37	26	19	.53	
Drug Use	.15	22	69**	.22	.43	.29	
Did Ose	100	15	. 89**	25	19	.14	
•	. 00	10 · \			•	≠ ,	
Alcohol Use	.03	02	.07	17	03	.43	
	17	. 2,9	.06	60	.31	. 15	

^{*} p < .05; ** p < .01

a Regular type indicates correlations for women; italicized type indicates correlations for men.

